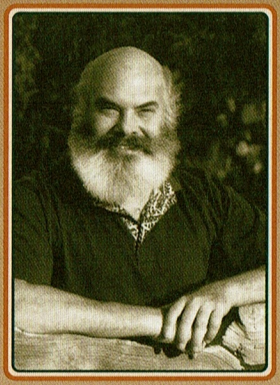

Dr. Andrew Weil's

Walk Your Way to Wellness

WITH COMPLIMENTS OF

Self Healing

Dr. Andrew Weil's
Walk Your Way to Wellness

Check with your doctor before beginning a vigorous walking program, particularly if you're over 40 and sedentary, or have a family or personal history of heart disease, experience chest pain at rest or with activity, or have a chronic medical condition. Any unusual, persistent, or severe symptoms that result from your participation in a walking program should be evaluated by a physician.

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Introduction

Today I woke with the sun and performed a ritual that never fails to bring me peace and harmony: I fed the dogs. Then, after doing some mindfulness meditation, I was ready for an adventure that would set my day in motion.

I took a walk.

With the sun still low in the sky, I headed out the front door of my ranch with Daisy and Jambo—two of my three Rhodesian ridgeback dogs—bounding out beside me. Within seconds all signs of civilization were behind us, the house, telephone, and glowing computer screen relegated to another world. Ahead was only nature, stands of trees soon giving way to the desert landscape I have come to love.

Keeping to my regular route, I strode up and down hills dotted with giant cactuses, prickly pears, and mesquite trees. Surrounding me were colors unique to the desert, bright rocks and the green of desert broom. In the distance were the Rincon Mountains, their craggy contours highlighted by the horizontal rays of the sun.

I kept up a steady, brisk pace as Daisy and Jambo ran ahead to follow their noses and explore what was off the beaten path. While lost in my thoughts, I also kept my eyes peeled for interesting wildlife—in the past I've seen everything from a silent bobcat to a herd of javelina, a sort of wild pig. Today, however, the only wild animals to cross my path were the pair of ridgebacks who kept checking on my progress along the familiar track.

The route is a loop, covering about three miles, and by the time I caught sight of my house again, some 45 minutes later, my breath was stimulated,

my heart was pumping, my mind was clear and refreshed, and I was looking forward to what the day had to bring.

Walking gives me great pleasure, in part because it feels so natural to me. Human beings were meant to walk: We are bipedal, upright organisms with bodies designed for locomotion. Whenever I come home after visiting traditional cultures in the Americas, Africa, or Asia, I am struck by the oddities of our modern habits of exercise. While a health-conscious American might jump in the car to drive six blocks to the local gym (then ride the elevator up to the StairMaster), people in nonindustrial societies get all the exercise they need simply by walking everywhere. They walk to gather water and wood, they walk to their fields, they walk to markets, they walk to visit friends and relatives. I often think that of all the technological inventions that have sabotaged our health, the automobile gets the prize, largely because it has deprived us of opportunities to walk.

Recent statistics show that more than 60 percent of Americans are not sufficiently active, and that some 25 percent of US adults are not active at all. These figures are very disturbing, not only because inactivity puts people at risk for a host of serious health conditions, but also because physical activity is freely available to everyone. Regardless of what the media latches onto as the latest fitness trend, you really don't have to sign up for a spinning class or learn the latest kickboxing moves in order to be fit and healthy. All you have to do is what you already do best: walk.

On these pages you'll find everything you need to know to start—or to stick with—a walking program. I've even included a section at the end of this booklet for you to keep a log of your weekly progress, to take notes about what you see along your route, or simply to record the way walking makes you feel. So what are you waiting for? I hope your daily walks bring you much pleasure and good health, and that they soon become as central to your life as they are to mine.

Walking from A to Z

Aerobic activity ▸ Many fitness buffs look down on walking as a wimpy alternative to running, playing competitive sports, or driving yourself to sweaty exhaustion on a stationary bicycle or some other aerobic torture machine. It's not so. Walking will satisfy your body's needs for aerobic exercise if you do it in ways that increase heart rate and respiration sufficiently (see "Goals" on page 8). I have known many people to attain maximum aerobic benefits through walking alone, and I've also seen obese people reach their optimal weights within several months simply by walking every day and sensibly modifying their diets. What's more, they've been able to keep the pounds off by maintaining these healthy habits.

Brisk walking—which burns about 100 calories a mile—has been shown to be as effective as running in reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke, and it's a lot kinder to your legs and back. Research shows that a sedentary person who gets up off the couch to start a regular walking regimen will have a significant reduction in the risk of heart attack. It's my prediction that fitness research will one day prove walking to be superior even to running as an all-round aerobic conditioner for the body.

A well-rounded conditioning program should include an aerobic component, such as walking, as well as strength-training exercises—using free weights, resistance equipment, or sit-ups and pushups—at least twice a week to tone muscles in your upper and lower body and protect your bones. In addition, no fitness program is complete without some gentle stretching or yoga to improve flexibility.

Brain boosting ▸ Walking offers benefits that many other forms of activity do not, such as inducing special brain rhythms related to coordinated motions of the arms and legs. When you walk, the movement of your limbs is cross-patterned: The right leg and the left arm move forward at the same time, and then the left leg and right arm. This type of movement generates electrical activity in the brain that has a harmonizing influence on your whole nervous system.

The activity of walking also improves the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain and increases production of natural substances known as neurotrophins, which enhance the growth of the brain's nerve cells and slow the effects of aging. Exciting new research continues to link physical exercise such as regular walking with better brain function—including quicker reaction times, ease of learning, and sharper memory.

Companionship ▸ My favorite walking companions are my dogs, who both keep me company and don't mind if I get lost in my thoughts along the way. But there are times when I really enjoy having a friend along to pass the time in conversation. Walking is a wonderful activity to share with people you like—a coworker, a friend, a spouse, or your children, who can learn a lot about being active simply by following your example.

For many people, having an exercise partner show up at the door or waiting at the trail head works as a powerful motivator: Recent research suggests that exercising with others can double your chance of sticking with it. I often tell people that if you want to unlearn old habits and learn new ones, you should spend time with people who have the habits you want. One way to do this is to join a walking club. The American Volkssport Association, for instance, has over 500 clubs in the US that sponsor noncompetitive walks for people of all ages and abilities. For information, call (800) 830-9255 or visit their Web site at *www.ava.org*.

Drink water ▸ Maybe it comes from living in the desert, but I can think of no greater pleasure than drinking a glass of cool, pure water when you're hot and thirsty. I have many vivid memories of coming back to my house after a summer hike and drinking glass after glass of delicious well water, feeling total satisfaction.

Drinking a sufficient quantity of water is crucial to the functioning of your body's natural purification system, and I generally recommend that everyone aim to take in at least six to eight glasses of good-quality water a day. When you start a regular walking program, be conscious of replacing what you lose through perspiration: You'd be surprised how much you sweat during an energetic walk—even in the cold of winter. Be sure to drink at least one glass of water before you set out, and if the weather's hot you might want to carry some along to sip during your jaunt.

Energy ▸ One of the most rewarding things about striding at a good clip is that it stimulates the brain to produce endorphins—opiatelike molecules that can make us high, happy, and more able to tolerate discomfort. These feel-good chemicals help ease stress and anxiety, alleviate mild depression, generate a sense of well-being, and fill you with energy during and after a good walk.

One common pitfall for people undertaking a walking program is the tendency to forgo the activity because they think they don't have enough energy for it. A secret known to habitual exercisers, however, is that effort *creates* energy—and this knowledge motivates veteran walkers to step out even when they feel their feet are dragging. One small study in the April 1998 issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* found that even cancer patients who were too tired to carry out normal daily activities saw a significant reduction in fatigue—and a major boost in self-confidence—after participating in a six-week treadmill walking program, five days a week.

Footwear ▸ The beauty of walking is its simplicity: You already know how to do it, you can do it anywhere, and it doesn't require any fancy gear. I do, however, advise walkers to invest in a good pair of shoes. Shop for footwear at the end of the day when your feet are at their largest. Look for a store that carries a full line of athletic shoes and has knowledgeable salespeople who can help you select the best shoe for your needs.

Don't be seduced by all the extra features some models offer—what you need is proper fit and support. I find that lightweight, flexible running shoes with well-cushioned heels and insoles work best for me, but you may find a walking or cross-training shoe more suitable. (You should be able to find a pair for under $100.) Most athletic stores also carry special walking socks that help wick away perspiration and prevent blisters.

Goals ▸ In my opinion, the ideal aerobic workout is a brisk, 45-minute walk covering three miles, taken at least five times a week. If you've been sedentary and are just getting started, you'll want to build up to that goal gradually and at your own pace. In my 8-Week Program, for example, I suggest that you begin walking just 10 minutes a day the first week; 15 minutes the second week; 20 minutes the third; and so on. Start walking at a pace that would allow you to converse comfortably with a partner.

If you're already fit and find that walking for 45 minutes does not elevate heart and respiratory rate, try walking faster (at least part of the time), to the point where it starts to be difficult to carry on a conversation. Or you can look for long, gradual hills to climb (see "Uphill strides" on page 16 and "Vary your routine"on page 17).

Many experts say that you should calculate your target heart rate and take your pulse frequently during aerobic exercise to make sure you're getting an adequate cardiovascular workout. I don't find this to be necessary, and I feel it can make your workout a lot less fun. When you walk for aerobic benefit, you should do so vigorously enough that you feel as though you've labored, with your heart beating faster and your breathing stimulated. Of course, if your walk leaves you collapsed on the ground gasping painfully for breath, you've overdone it.

Heart ▸ In 1992, the American Heart Association named physical inactivity as an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease (the nation's number-one killer), and a number of studies have shown that brisk walking can do a great deal to protect your heart. Moderate exercise such as walking improves circulation, makes the heart a more-efficient pump, maintains the elasticity of arteries, and counteracts at least four other major risk factors for heart disease by lowering blood pressure, raising levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol, warding off weight gain, and helping to prevent diabetes.

Well-publicized data from the Harvard Nurses' Health Study—which has been tracking the habits of more than 80,000 female nurses for many years—found that women aged 40 to 65 who reported walking briskly at least three hours a week had a 54 percent lower risk of heart attack and stroke than sedentary subjects. More recently, a study of 836 subjects in the April 12, 1999 *Archives of Internal Medicine* linked regular, moderate exercise (walking as little as 60 minutes a week) with a reduced risk of having a first heart attack—a benefit comparable to that conferred by higher-intensity activities.

Check with your doctor before beginning a vigorous walking program, particularly if you're over 40 and sedentary, or have a family or personal history of heart disease, or have chest pain at rest or with activity.

Indoor walking ▸ While it's possible to walk outdoors in any weather, even the most dedicated walker may be thrown off course by heat waves, drenching rain, or ice underfoot. One alternative is to use an indoor track at a local high school or health club, or to find a gym with a treadmill or to buy your own (make sure you're properly instructed on its use).

Another possibility—one that has seen a surge in popularity over the last 15 years or so—is mall-walking: There are hundreds of malls across the country that open their doors before shopping hours to let people use them for walking, and many sponsor formal mall-walking clubs. Participants are drawn by the even surfaces, controlled climate, and lack of outdoor annoyances such as puddles and insects. Others find that mall-walking offers them needed security: Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that while 25 percent of Americans don't exercise, that figure jumps to 50 percent among women who live in unsafe areas.

Joints ▸ One of the greatest advantages of walking over high-impact forms of exercise is that it poses little risk of injury and is gentle on the joints, making it ideal for people who have arthritis or are recovering from injuries (as is water-walking; see page 17). Many of my patients with osteoarthritis of the knees have found that walking not only doesn't aggravate their condition, it helps relieve symptoms: Those who take part in a walking program often end up being able to walk farther and are able to attend to everyday activities with less difficulty, while reporting a decrease in pain and need for medication.

With excess pounds known to be an exacerbating factor for arthritis, walking provides a good, efficient way to burn calories for weight loss. In addition, activities such as walking help to squeeze out waste products from the cartilage of the foot, leg, and hip joints, allowing them to take up fresh nutrients from surrounding fluids in between steps.

Keep at it ▸ As with any form of exercise, the benefits of walking accrue over time. But like any other exercise routine, no matter what the experts tell you about how great you will feel, when you first start walking every day you may have to push yourself to stick with it. Making a walking program enjoyable is your greatest challenge at this stage, because if you fail to do that, you are likely to let your program slide before it becomes established as a good habit. But once you get beyond the initial stage and move into a different relationship with aerobic activity, I promise that it will make you feel good—both physically and mentally—and that days when you don't walk won't feel quite right or complete.

Here are some tips for staying the course:

- **Pick a good time.** Some experts believe that if you want to make walking part of your daily routine, you're best off choosing a time when you feel most energetic. People in many cultures find sunrise to be a good time to set the body in motion—and I, for one, find an energizing walk to be the perfect way to start my day.
- **Keep track.** Some people are more motivated if they keep a written log of the hours and miles they walk: Research shows that you may be more likely to stick to an exercise program if you keep track of your progress. Other people like to keep a diary of observations along their route. (In the back of this booklet, you will find space to keep your own personal record.)

• **Celebrate your accomplishments.** Set goals and reward yourself when you meet them. For example, after successfully increasing your walking time for a full week, treat yourself to a bouquet of flowers or an evening out. When you meet your ultimate goal of walking 45 minutes a day at least five days a week, schedule a relaxing massage or another enjoyable activity.

• **Explore.** Some walkers find that focusing on one aspect of their surroundings—native birds, trees, or flowers, say, or even local architecture—offers a special incentive to get out and add to their specialized knowledge.

• **Get lost.** Instead of following your usual route, try veering off in another direction and heading down streets or paths you've never walked before. It's amazing how much more you can discover at a civilized walking pace than you would ever notice when speeding by in your car.

Longevity ▸ Those who are seeking the secret of longer life may need look no farther than their own two feet: In recent years, epidemiological data has increasingly linked regular walking with a decreased risk of death. One 12-year follow-up study of 707 nonsmoking retired men aged 61 to 81 who were enrolled in the Honolulu Heart Program found that those who walked more than two miles a day halved their risk of dying from cancer and other causes compared to men who walked less than a mile a day (*New England Journal of Medicine,* January 8, 1998).

Another much-publicized Finnish study tracked nearly 16,000 twins for an average of 19 years and found that those who took brisk half-hour walks as few as six times a month were 44 percent less likely to die during the course of the study than their sedentary twins (*Journal of the American Medical Association,* February 11, 1998).

A Dutch study, which followed 802 men for 10 years, found that regular walking or cycling for at least 20 minutes three times a week was associated with a reduced mortality risk from cardiovascular disease and other causes in men over 64 (*Archives of Internal Medicine,* July 27, 1998).

Are you motivated yet?

Music ▸ I have long been fascinated with the power of sound, which has a remarkable ability to influence your mood and affect your nervous system. One reason why sound influences us so much has to do with a process called entrainment, whereby various body processes—including respiration, heart rate, and brainwaves—synchronize with the frequencies and rhythms of what we hear.

Many walkers find that taking along a cassette player and listening to music through earphones helps to keep their feet moving quickly. Having pleasant stimulating sounds to attend to while walking can be as helpful as beautiful sights, with the added advantage of rhythm to synchronize your movements. As to *which* compositions make the best walking music, my advice is simply to listen to what you like, perhaps leaning toward selections that have a lively beat.

Alternatively, some walkers pass the time by listening to books on tape, or even learning a foreign language through recorded lessons. There are also dozens of tapes on the market specially geared toward walking, some including lessons on walking techniques.

Nature ▸ Connecting with nature is healing: It slows us down, takes us out of our routines, and reminds us that we live on a remarkable planet that we share with many forms of life. I find walking in nature to be wonderfully restorative to the spirit, and immersing myself in local flora (and fauna) during my daily walks is one of my greatest pleasures.

Wherever you live, I strongly recommend doing at least some of your walking in a natural environment. Not only is such a setting soothing to the soul, it will add visual interest to your walk, allowing you to concentrate on the beautiful sights around you and forget about counting the minutes. Even the most bustling of cities have parks or "green ways" that offer quiet paths for walking.

Optimum health ▸ As anyone familiar with my 8-Week Program knows, I firmly believe that optimum health can be achieved gradually through basic lifestyle changes. A simple walking regimen, to my mind, is the form of physical activity most likely to lead to optimum health, the one with the greatest capacity to keep the healing system in good working order and increase the likelihood of spontaneous healing in the case of illness. It's not just a coincidence that many of the healthiest people I know are also dedicated walkers.

While conferring a host of powerful health benefits, walking is gentle enough that even people with physical problems such as intermittent claudication (a painful circulatory condition of the legs) or Crohn's disease (a debilitating disorder of the digestive system) have been shown to improve their symptoms by doing it on a regular basis. In addition, regular walking appears to offer an overall boost in immunity: According to a report in the February 1999 issue of *Sports Medicine*, studies on the influence of moderate exercise on immune function show that near-daily brisk walking over a 12- to 15-week period reduced subjects' number of sickness days by half as compared to an inactive group of controls.

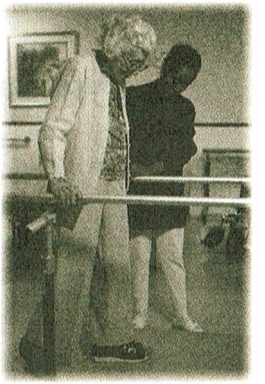
Posture ▸ Walk tall! Maintaining proper posture while you walk will foster good respiration and blood circulation and prevent back strain or excess fatigue. Remember to stand up straight, pull in your chin, relax your shoulders, tuck in your buttocks, and look ahead, not at your feet. To check your alignment, try imagining a straight vertical line passing from your ears down through your shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles. (Unless you're walking uphill, don't lean forward while you walk in an effort to move faster—this will only result in back strain.) Walk heel to toe, rolling your foot gently with each step, and keep your stride full and natural.

Quick bouts ▸ There's good news for busy people who can't always find a 45-minute stretch in the day to devote to walking: Several clinical trials have found that multiple, 10-minute bursts of exercise accumulated throughout the day yield essentially the same benefits—in blood pressure, weight, body fat, cholesterol levels, or cardiovascular fitness—as the same total amount of exercise done in a continuous session. In one controlled study of 47 sedentary women, for example, some of the subjects took brief (10-minute) bouts of brisk walking three times a day, while others set off on 30-minute daily walks. After following this regimen five times a week for 10 weeks, both groups showed similar improvements in fitness (*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, January 1998).

While I still recommend taking a full, 45-minute walk at least five times a week, it's good to keep in mind that on days when this is impossible, you may be able to make up for it with quick walks. Leave your car at home and take a speedy walk to the store; climb the stairs instead of riding the elevator; circle the block a few times on foot before heading into work. Keep in mind that some exercise is always better than none, and that even 10 minutes of walking today will help you to bounce back to your usual routine tomorrow.

Reduce risk of disease ▸ If you still have any doubts that walking is serious stuff, be aware that a growing body of evidence shows that moderate exercise such as walking may lower your risk of developing a number of serious illnesses. Here's some of the latest research:

- **Cancer.** A study published in the March 1, 1995 *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that men who took a couple of hours' worth of brisk walks each week had a significant decrease in the incidence of colon cancer—and the more hours they walked, the lower the risk. Researchers theorize that regular walking strengthens the immune system and speeds potentially carcinogenic wastes through the colon. Other research suggests that walking offers a protective effect against cancers of the lung and prostate.
- **Stroke.** Walking's ability to lower blood pressure is one mechanism by which it appears to ward off the risk of stroke. According to the ongoing



Harvard Alumni Health Study of 11,130 men, subjects who reported moderate physical activity in 1977—as measured by the number of blocks walked and flights of stairs climbed daily—were the least likely to have suffered a stroke 13 years later, when a follow-up survey was done (*Stroke*, October 1998).

• **Osteoporosis.** Research shows that even modest doses of walking and other weight-bearing exercise increase bone density and may prevent or slow the onset of osteoporosis, the bone-thinning disease that often leads to fractures and other complications. In one seven-and-a-half-year study of 9,704 elderly women, even low-intensity activities such as walking for at least an hour a week were linked to significant reductions in fractures of the hip (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, July 15, 1998).

• **Balance disorders.** One reason why walking may result in fewer fractures in older people is because it's a learned skill, and when you don't walk often enough, you actually start to forget how to do it. This leads to poorer coordination and balance disturbances—and more-frequent falls. In a recent study that tracked the health of 196 postmenopausal women for 10 years, regular walkers not only had a significantly reduced risk of heart disease, they also reported fewer hospitalizations, surgeries, and falls than their more-sedentary peers (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, August 10–24, 1998).

• **Diabetes.** Not only is walking a great way to combat obesity (a known risk factor for adult-onset diabetes), it also helps stabilize blood-sugar (glucose) levels and prevent insulin resistance. One study of more than 1,400 men and women aged 40 to 69 (some with normal glucose levels and some with mild diabetes) found that walking as little as 30 minutes a day might help the body improve the use of its own insulin and ward off diabetes (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 4, 1998).

• **Prostate enlargement.** The condition may be benign, but having an enlarged prostate greatly reduces quality of life for the many older men who have it. The good news is that walking can help prevent it from ever happening: Data from the Health Professionals Follow-up Study showed that middle-aged and older men who were more physically active had a lower frequency of urinary tract symptoms—and that walking two or three hours a week, a prevalent activity, reduced risk of benign prostatic hyperplasia by 25 percent (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, November 23, 1998).

Swing your arms ▸ Most people know that swinging your arms while walking increases your cardiovascular benefit, but few people know exactly how to do it. I've seen all extremes—from people who pace stiffly with their arms dangling by their sides to some wildly swinging walkers who look silly and are probably putting themselves at risk for injury.

As you walk, make sure your arms are extended, and let them swing freely and naturally from your sides. For a rhythmic challenge, try coordinating your arm swing with your breathing. You might also want to experiment with carrying hand weights, which will increase the aerobic benefits of your walk, or walking poles, which can be useful on uneven terrain.

Tours ▸ Traveling can put a crimp in many an exercise routine—but the advantage of a walking program is that you can take it anywhere. Do your best to keep up your daily walks while you're on the road: You can always stride along city streets, in airports, and through parks and shopping malls. In fact, cities often provide wonderful opportunities to walk. Some of the best walks I've ever had have been in San Francisco, where the hills make for great aerobic exercise, and New York, where human diversity never fails to keep me entertained.

One smart alternative is to make walking the *focus* of your vacation plans by signing up for a walking tour, whether it's an afternoon architectural tour of Boston or a weeklong walking tour of English castles.

Uphill strides ▸ For maximum cardiovascular benefit, I recommend including some uphill walking on your everyday route—long, moderate, sustained grades are terrific. If you're in good shape, factor in several uphill grades or look for steeper hills. You'll find that the easiest way to approach a hill is to keep your back straight and lean slightly into it, easing the strain on your leg muscles. Taking shorter steps on the way down will help save your knees.

Vary your routine ▸ Are your walks starting to feel too tame? Varying your terrain or your pace will heighten both your interest and your aerobic reward. One option is to try walking on a more-resistant surface—like sand. According to a study in the July 1998 *Journal of Experimental Biology*, walking on sand requires 2.1 to 2.7 times more energy expenditure than walking on a hard surface at the same speed. You'll want to walk near the water's edge, where the sand is firmest. (Don't forget your sunscreen.) Walking in wet sand is a great cardiovascular workout that also tones your calf and upper-leg muscles, and improves your balance.

Another way to better benefit your heart is interval walking, in which you vary your speed throughout your walk. For example, you might try alternating your regular walking pace with a faster stride (take quicker steps, not longer ones). If you're looking for a challenge, give racewalking a try: You'll need to learn a special technique (posture and gait are especially important at high speeds), and I'd recommend finding an instructor to make sure you start off on the right foot.

Water-walking ▸ Some people gravitate toward water-walking because of arthritis or injury, while others simply use it as a way to rev up their walking routine. And rightly so: Wading through waist-deep water can burn 300 to 500 calories an hour, and walking in chest-high water while swinging your arms offers a substantial full-body workout.

Because the water helps support you, putting less strain on your joints, this is still a low-impact form of exercise. Yet the resistance that water provides makes it a better activity than regular walking for strengthening your muscles, and you don't have to move as fast to get the same aerobic benefit you would on land: Walking two miles-per-hour in thigh-high water burns the same amount of calories as walking three miles-per-hour on dry ground.

You'll want to walk in water that's a comfortable temperature: Water that is *too* hot may raise your heart rate too much, while cold water can cause joint stiffness or pain. Some indoor pools have special lanes for water-walkers, while ocean lovers may want to try walking through temperate water at the beach (stay parallel to the shore). Start out slowly, with maybe five minutes of walking in knee-deep water. Over time, you should be able to walk faster and in deeper water for at least 20 minutes a session. Wearing special water sandals or aqua socks will protect your feet.

X-Files ▸ Okay, I admit it: I sometimes watch tapes of *The X-Files* when I'm walking on my home stair-climbing machine. Like many people, I get easily bored by mechanical pacing, which I generally do only in inclement weather. To ease the monotony, I've set up a TV and VCR in my exercise room, which is stocked with an eclectic collection of videos. I've covered miles while watching everything from PBS documentaries to *The Buddy Holly Story* to *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*—and I'd recommend this technique to anyone with home exercise equipment as a harmless way to keep moving.

Year-round benefits ▸ The weather here in Arizona may offer me a special advantage, but outdoor walking can easily be a year-round activity in most climates. In fact, walking outdoors in the winter may be your best way to fight cabin fever, work off extra calories from the holidays, and counteract the light deprivation that can lead to seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

Many people avoid being outdoors too long when the temperatures dip, but with the right weatherproof clothing, walking in winter can be pleasantly invigorating. The secret is proper layering: Too many layers will make you sweat even in the coldest weather, making you feel chilled as wetness gets trapped inside your clothing. Most experts recommend a simple three-layer approach: Start with a synthetic undershirt and leggings made of polypropylene, a fabric that wicks away perspiration from the skin so that it doesn't strip heat from the body. Next, wear a wool or fleece jacket or vest for warmth (choosing one that buttons or zips up the front in case you're too hot). Finally, add an outside layer that blocks the wind, like a nylon windbreaker or a Gore-Tex jacket. Don't forget to wear a hat (wool or polyester) and mittens (which work better than gloves, as your fingers keep each other warm). Your socks should be wool or polyester to draw sweat away from your feet, but not so thick that they'll reduce circulation. As for shoes, your regular walking shoes or snow boots may be sufficient, or you could look for special "snow sneakers" from a company such as L. L. Bean.

Hot weather can also provide challenges, as I well know. But even in the heat of the desert, I find that walking in the early morning hours or late in the day works fine, if I don't overexert myself and drink plenty of water.

Zen walking ▸ Your daily walking program is a great aerobic conditioner for your body and will go a long way toward keeping it healthy. But human beings are bodies, minds, and spirits, and you may find that walking mindfully as an adjunct to your normal routine can greatly relax the mind and soothe the spirit as well. Walking quietly in a natural setting is a simple form of meditation, an antidote for being too much in our heads, too focused on thoughts and emotion.

For centuries, monks both Eastern and Western have incorporated repetitive phrases, breath awareness, and prayer into their daily walks, and now mindful walking is being embraced by an increasing number of people who use it to center themselves and trigger the relaxation response by focusing on the rhythmic motions of their steps and their breath.

One technique that some mindful walkers use is to introduce a mantra—a repeated sound or phrase that helps to empty the mind of intrusive or anxious thoughts. For example, every time your weight falls on your left foot, you might say "left . . . left" or substitute an inspirational phrase from your faith or tradition, such as "lotus flower" or "shalom, shalom." You might also use your breathing as a repetitive focus, taking a certain number of steps with each breath.

If you'd like to explore walking as a spiritual practice, you may want to take a look at a good book on the subject, such as Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation* (Parallax Press, 1996) or *The Spirited Walker: Fitness Walking for Clarity, Balance, and Spiritual Connection,* by Carolyn Scott Kortge (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

A Walking Diary

The following pages have been set aside as a space for you to keep a log of your daily walks and thoughts. Write down whatever is important or helpful to you—how much time you spend walking, the weather that day, the distance you cover, where you go, what you see along the way, how walking affects your body and your mood, or anything else you'd like to note. For those just starting a walking program, I've suggested a gradual increase in walking times that is in keeping with my 8-Week Program for optimum health. When you've filled up the pages provided here, you can create your own walking diary to continue to track your progress and sustain motivation throughout the year.

Walking Diary

WEEK ONE

Walk 10 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Start out at your own pace, preferably at a speed that would allow you to talk comfortably with a partner.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK TWO

Walk 15 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Remember to swing your arms freely and naturally and to keep your shoulders relaxed.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

Walking Diary

WEEK THREE

Walk 20 minutes a day, at least 5 days this week. Pay attention to your posture: Make sure you're standing tall and looking ahead, not down at your feet.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK FOUR

Walk 25 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Plan to walk somewhere in nature and observe the local flora and fauna.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

Walking Diary

WEEK FIVE

Walk 30 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Try picking up the pace a bit, striding at a clip that makes it a little more difficult to converse.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK SIX

Walk 35 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Vary your normal route and explore an area you've never been to before.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

Walking Diary

WEEK SEVEN

Walk 40 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Include some gentle hills along the way to increase the aerobic benefit.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

WEEK EIGHT

Walk 45 minutes a day, at least five days this week. Congratulations! You've met your goal. Keep it up, and eventually try to cover three miles in this time.

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

For More Information

If you would like additional information about walking or natural healing, please refer to the following helpful resources:

BOOKS

- **Walk Yourself Well** by Sherry Brourman (Hyperion, 1999)

By DR. ANDREW WEIL:

- **Eating Well for Optimum Health** (Quill, 2001)
- **8 Weeks to Optimum Health** (Ballantine, 1998)
- **Health and Healing** (Houghton Mifflin, 1998)
- **Natural Health, Natural Medicine: A Comprehensive Manual for Wellness and Self-Care** (Houghton Mifflin, 1998)
- **Spontaneous Healing: How to Discover and Enhance Your Body's Natural Ability to Maintain and Heal Itself** (Ballantine, 2000)

ON THE INTERNET

Self Healing ▸ www.drweilselfhealing.com
This website features articles from current and past issues of Dr. Weil's monthly health newsletter. Visitors can obtain a free issue and order bound annual editions, as well as other special products.

Ask Dr. Weil ▸ www.drweil.com
Dr. Weil's website includes the popular "Ask Dr. Weil" daily Q & A column, message boards, and links to other resources.

NEWSLETTER

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